

SOLDIER SUMMIT

Wasatch County

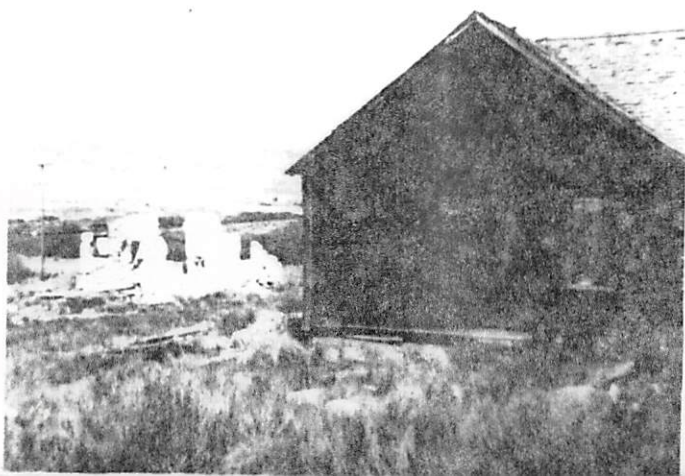
Railroad
Class 6

Soldier Summit is important to railroad logistics as it is the highest point on the railroad in Utah, 7450 feet. The somewhat peculiar name is a bit shrouded in legend. Some say the departing soldiers from abandoned Camp Floyd (Fort Crittenden), under Gen. Philip St. George Cooke, were caught unprepared in a chilling blizzard in July 1861 on the summit. A couple of the soldiers died during the snowstorm and were buried on the summit. Another story agrees that the troops moved up the creek now called East Fork of Soldier Creek, were not caught in a storm, but merely passed over the broad summit on their way east. The graves, apparently, are still there, however, and even in these times sudden freezing storms come up occasionally during summer which makes the first account very likely.

When the railroad was built over the summit, a passing track and locomotive-turning wye were constructed to send the helper engines back down to Colton or Tucker. A small community of railroad employees lived at the top but had no town facilities. Then in 1919 the railroad moved its division point from Helper to Soldier Summit, building classification yards, passenger and freight stations, a roundhouse, locomotive shops and facilities, plus 70 employee homes, a large hotel, swimming pool and YMCA building, totalling over a million dollars. Naturally, other non-railroad enterprisers got into the act and built three stores, two automobile garages, a restaurant, billiard hall and real estate office. A modern schoolhouse was also erected. Three years later, activity was so heavy at the railroad that 50 more homes were built. Over 300 people lived in town from 1925-30. In 1930, due to railroad economics, the division point was changed back to Helper, and the vast majority of facilities at the Summit were taken away. Most of the equipment as well as buildings were taken to Helper. A few non-rail operations were left to wither away.

A couple of service stations, cafe and motel of fairly recent origin and two or three occupied houses cluster together along U.S. Highway 6-50. Several intact, deserted houses plus acres and acres of foundations and falling walls stretch across the Summit. The side roads in the area are littered with bottle fragments, nails, spikes and many other items which make off-highway driving hazardous.

References: 6, 21, 23.



THISTLE

Utah County

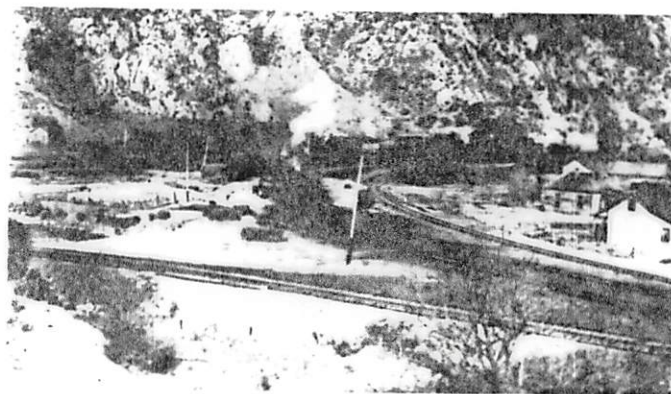
Railroad
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Ranchers and farmers have lived in Thistle Valley for many years, and the railroad installed a siding there for produce and livestock loading as early as 1883-84. In 1890 the railroad built a branch line starting at Thistle, down to the Sanpete Valley Railroad at Manti, thence down to the mine loading ramps at Marysville. As the terminal locomotive facilities for the southern branch became established, Thistle, named after the valley full of Canada thistles, grew into a typical railroad town. The entire small valley was filled with railroad yards, loading ramps, coal and water towers, and other railroad paraphernalia. Homes, stores, a church and school were built on the fringes of the railroad. In 1913 a large roundhouse was built to handle the helper engines on the longer but easier grade east-bound.

Again, as the railroad streamlined its operations and dieselized its motive power, many unnecessary structures were removed, the work force was shifted away and the town life shrank back into the shade of the mountains. Although trains continue to work the Sevier Branch, they pass straight through Thistle to and from Provo.

The railroad flavor is all but gone now, just a few seldom-used maintenance buildings are centered in the valley. Several families still live along the outskirts of town heading south on U.S. Highway 89 and east along U.S. Highway 6-50. The abandoned schoolhouse and remains of a service station on a ridge at the highway junction remind the casual passer-by that Thistle is not what it used to be. Across the tracks on the west edge of town are several interesting old houses, some occupied, and the deserted business district cloaked by heavy trees.

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Above — The roundhouse against the mountain in Thistle was always busy preparing locomotives to help on the steep pull to Soldier Summit. The foreground track leads to the left down to Marysville.

UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Left — Once under consideration as a possible division point, Colton now just feels the breeze of passing trains.

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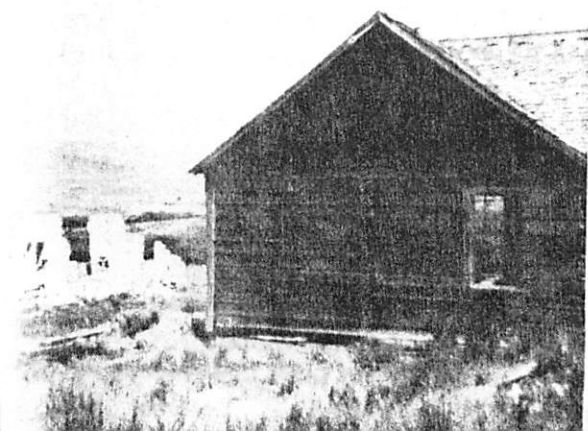
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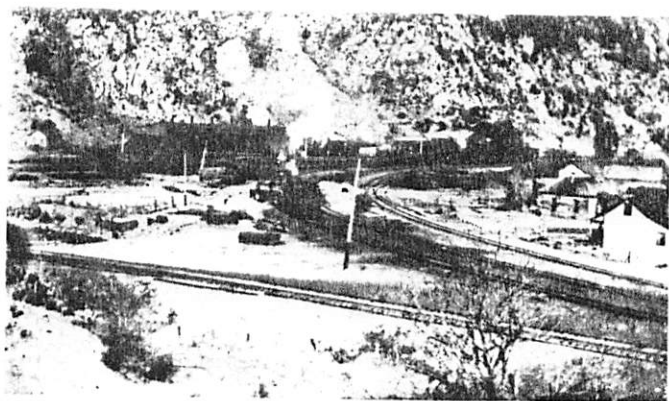
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— From Ghost Towns of Utah
by Dr
4-1-85

RIO GRANDE RAILROAD TOWNS

As the Utah and Pleasant Valley Railroad, a narrow gauge predecessor of the Denver and Rio Grande Western, was building from Springville down through Thistle Valley and up through Spanish Fork Canyon in 1875-79, several aggregations of settlers located at various points along the line but anything resembling an actual town probably did not develop to any great extent. The small coal-hauling railroad reached the confluence of Clear Creek and the forks of Soldier Creek, turned south up the South Fork of Soldier Creek to its head then down into Pleasant Valley where it tapped the coal mines at Winter Quarters and Scofield. As with many other railroad ventures, cash was scarce but commodities were not. As the narrow gauge rails were being laid, the company, which had stores in Springville, paid its workers what cash it had and, inasmuch as

TUCKER Utah County

Railroad
Class 1

The Rio Grande elected not to follow the steep coal railroad south from the Clear Creek-Soldier Creek forks and instead built eastward along the East Fork. Thus the railroad junction at the mouth of Clear Creek became an important loading point and construction camp. A good-sized town called Clear Creek, of possibly 500, was built up rapidly. Many carloads of coal came down every day from the Pleasant Valley mines, and supplies and freight arrived from Salt Lake City bound for Winter Quarters and the railroad construction. Dozens of shanties, cabins and houses were built in the small valley; hotels and boarding houses were crowded. Even then those who couldn't find a bed resorted to railroad cars and station platforms. Stores were busy and saloons were popular.

As the boom settled down the town remained an important railroad location. Helper engines were stationed there to assist eastbound trains over Soldier Summit. A three-stall engine house, station and bunk houses, coal station and water tower kept many railroaders busy for years. At some point the town's name was changed to Tucker, named for a James Tucker. This may have been done in order not to be confused with the growing coal town of Clearcreek at the lower end of Pleasant Valley just over the hill in Carbon County.

In the 1915 era when the railroad revamped the line in order to cut down the steep eastbound gradient, much of the location of Tucker was covered by large fillwork as the new road bed was lifted far above the valley floor. The railroad operations at Tucker came to an end and only a station and siding high on the hill remained. All the buildings are now gone, a roadside park occupies the former townsite and even the old railroad grade is almost completely covered by the high fill. Tucker is now important only as the beginning of the scenic Skyline Drive down the backbone of the Wasatch Plateau.

References: 6, 21, 23.

calico was the standard cotton fabric of the times, most of the builders took the rest of their pay in bolts of calico. It wasn't long before the line was known as the "Calico Railroad."

Towns did not really develop along the line till 1881-83 when the Rio Grande Railroad took over the Utah and Pleasant Valley and rebuilt the line, as well as extending new track up over Soldier Summit, down to Price and beyond.

COLTON Utah County

Railroad
Class 5

Pleasant Valley Junction came into being in 1883 as the Rio Grande was building down from Soldier Summit to Price. Shortly after the main line was constructed, a branch line from the junction was built up toward the Pleasant Valley mines along a much easier grade than the old Pleasant Valley line down to Tucker. When this track-age reached Scofield the older line was abandoned and all subsequent coal and merchandise traffic flowed through the Junction.

The railroad built an eleven-stall roundhouse and turntable, along with a depot, roadmaster's office, water tower, bunkhouses and a coal loading facility. Helper engines were used on westbound coal drags over Soldier Summit. Sometime just prior to 1898 the town's name was changed to Colton, probably after William F. Colton, a Rio Grande Western official. In 1915 Colton was investigated as to the possibilities of enlarging the railroad operations and forming a division point. Even though the town's location held several advantages, the railroad decided on Soldier Summit instead.

As long as steam power ruled the rails Colton was in business and boasted in 1940 of a population of 327. However, as diesel locomotives took over, they were able to haul the heavy coal trains over the Summit without the helpers at Colton and the rail facilities rapidly became obsolete. In the 1950's all unnecessary railroad operations and buildings were removed leaving only some maintenance equipment and loading sidings. Then as coal shipments from Pleasant Valley fell off, even some of these were unnecessary.

The town was quite busy in its day. In fact, possibly a little too busy as it burned down three times. After the last time it was not built up to any great extent.

At present the railroad continues to maintain some equipment at trackside. A couple of picturesque intact buildings and ruins line the road into the townsite, as it drops down to the railroad from U.S. Highway 6-50, 0.8 mile south of the junction of State Highway 96. Purple bottle fragments glimmer in the sunlight and rusted metal parts litter the foothills. Up on the highway sits the old store, still in use, moved from its former location down in town.

References: 6, 23.